

Part I

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

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Organization Development (OD) has been a recognized form of organizational consulting and change and a scholarly discipline for almost six decades. Its antecedents date back to Kurt Lewin and his associates in the 1940s (Jones and Brazzel 2014). As all textbooks on OD describe (Anderson 2015; Cummings and Worley 2014; French and Bell 1978; McLean 2005) it resulted from various streams of post-World War II thought, values, and action coming together, including planned change, action research, humanistic psychology, group dynamics, survey research methods, participative management, and laboratory education. These foundational theories and methods of OD led, in the 1960s, to the formation of the OD Network, the original 1969 Addison-Wesley series of OD books edited by Warren Bennis, Richard Beckhard, and Edgar Schein, and the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* and *OD Practitioner*, two of the leading OD-related scholarly and practitioner journals to this day. By the 1970s, OD certificate and graduate degree programs taught the foundational concepts of OD—process, not prescriptive consultation; the tenet that change involves unfreezing, movement, and refreezing; action research methods including data collection, diagnosis, and feedback to identify the real issues and stimulate movement from the initial “frozen” state, followed by planned interventions based on behavioral science research to help achieve and secure the desired future state—all supported by an underlying normative value base that emphasized a humanistic, democratic, client-centered orientation (Marshak 2014).

What is not emphasized in these accounts is that OD did not suddenly appear one day as a fully formed and identifiable construct. Instead, consultants, change agents, and academics experimented with different ideas and methods based on the social sciences and cultural norms of the times. While the components of OD were mostly present and being practiced by the mid-1950s, it

was not until they were conceptualized as a coherent approach to consulting and change that people thought of these components as linked together to form an understandable paradigm. What helped this happen was having a new name, *organization development*, become an accepted term to connote this new approach, even if defining exactly what OD means continues to be difficult to this day. So in that sense one day there was no “organization development” and then as if overnight the name was articulated, accepted, and used to bring people, practices, and ideas together. Exactly where and when and with whom the term *organization development* originated is part of OD folklore and has not been proven, but the usual attributions are to important founders of the field. In 1974 Larry Porter, the first editor of the *OD Practitioner*, diplomatically recognized two independent originators. “Dick Beckhard while consulting at General Electric in 1957 invented the term organization development. Herb Shepard while consulting at Esso in 1957 invented the term organization development” (Porter 1974, 1). Marv Weisbord had a somewhat different story: “Douglas McGregor and Richard Beckhard while consulting together at General Mills in the 1950s . . . coined the term *organization development* (OD)” (Weisbord 1987 112).

We raise this aspect of OD history because it helps to explain what we have been doing for the past several years and what we hope this book will do for its readers. Both of us are longtime academics and practitioners of OD, going back to the 1970s. We have participated in and observed changes and additions to OD practices beginning in the 1980s and accelerating into the new century. We became uncomfortable with how most OD textbooks and articles try to fit these newer practices into the foundational models formulated in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. We think this limits understanding of deeper differences, leads to confusion about what is or is not OD, and reduces the possibilities for how OD can be practiced. We think that when a new blend of premises and practices is freed from the constraining foundational framings, an outline of a different approach to OD is revealed. We also think that this different approach is still a form of organization development because it emerged mainly from OD practitioners and academics and is consistent with core foundational OD values and ideas about collaborative consulting.

Our shared belief—that something going on in the world of practice was not being well represented in the official texts of the field—led us to work together on articulating this new approach and how it might be similar to and different from the foundational forms of OD. Our 2009 article in the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* called it “Dialogic OD” in contrast to the foundational form we called “Diagnostic OD,” picking up on a central aspect of each approach (Bushe and Marshak 2009). Importantly, as our brief revisiting of the early days of OD in the 1950s helps underscore, dialogic change ideas and methods were being used by practitioners long before we offered

our conceptual understanding of how they had converged into a still evolving, new(er) form of OD (Coghlan, 2011). It is the conceptualization of a set of underlying premises and practices named “Dialogic OD” in combination that is “new,” more than the streams of ideas, theories, methods, and practices that contribute to it.

After the publication of that article and presentations at various conferences we met with practitioners and academics who felt we were articulating something that gave coherence and meaning to what they were experiencing, and wanted us to say more. That led to other publications (Bushe and Marshak 2013, 2014a, 2014b) that sparked even more interest. These efforts seem to have captured something for many people, and the term “Dialogic OD” and its associated concepts are now being used and explored in consulting and change communities around the world. At the same time, despite the growing interest in Dialogic OD there was no comprehensive source of information about it. No Addison-Wesley series. No book that would help explain it in some detail. So we decided, with the help of an international cast of scholars and practitioners, to provide such a resource.

The purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive understanding of what Dialogic OD is as an approach to organizational change and consulting; how it differs from and is similar to Diagnostic OD; the key ideas that have shaped its current form; and the considerations that influence how it is practiced. We wish to legitimate Dialogic OD as an OD approach in its own right, and free its potential from the limits imposed by trying to fit its concepts and methods into previously established models that may seem similar but are based on very different premises. The term *Dialogic Organization Development* will become, we hope, a generative image that will allow OD scholars and professionals to reimagine and reinvigorate the theory and practice of OD. In offering the image of Dialogic OD, we hope to create a space where conversations can take place about the nature of organizations and organizing, about the nature of change processes and change agency, and about the nature of leadership and consulting, that adhere to OD values but fall outside the traditional diagnostic mindset.

Outline of the Book

This book is divided into three sections. The first section presents our overview of the theory and practice of Dialogic OD. In Chapter 1 we review the basic premises we think underlie the successful use of Dialogic OD methods. We list dozens of methods OD practitioners are currently using to support change in organizations, but we do not talk about those in this book. Rather, this book is about the theories and practices that support thoughtful and successful utilization of those methods. We call this a “Dialogic OD Mindset,” and

describe its eight key premises and the three main underlying change processes that have to be present for any method to work. In Chapter 1, we just look at them briefly, inasmuch as each will be further elaborated in the Theory section of the book. In this chapter we also describe how the Dialogic OD Mindset is different from, and similar to, the foundational “Diagnostic OD Mindset” that it sprang from.

In Chapter 2 we provide an overview of the theories of practice we see underlying all the different Dialogic OD approaches. We briefly identify the kinds of things OD practitioners do to facilitate dialogic interactions, design dialogic events, and design strategies for change. In general, we find that Dialogic OD is being practiced in two main ways. One is a more structured approach, whereby an OD practitioner helps design and facilitates a process for engaging the relevant stakeholders in a dialogic change process that has a beginning, middle, and end. The other is a less structured approach in which an OD practitioner joins into a client system and engages in multiple, ongoing interactions with the intent of helping the system to develop and be more effective. We call this latter form “dialogic process consulting”. These forms of practice will be covered in much great detail in the book’s third section on practice.

The second section of the book provides a solid theoretical base for the Dialogic OD practitioner. We strongly believe that what helps practitioners succeed is the depth and breadth of the theoretical base they draw on for choosing, using, and mixing different methods. In this section noted OD scholar-practitioners provide guidance on how to think about organizations and change. These theory chapters relate to the three underlying change processes introduced in Chapter 1: discourse and narratives, generative images, and emergence and complexity. The first two chapters offer different and complementary ways of thinking about the nature of social reality and creating change through changing narratives.

Chapter 3, by Frank Barrett, provides the student of OD with an understanding of the philosophical foundations of Diagnostic and Dialogic OD. Barrett outlines the pillars of modernist thinking that grew out of the Enlightenment and shows how several of these pillars informed the early practice and theories associated with OD. He then reviews challenges to this approach that call attention to the importance of attending to social life as a continual process in which the impermanence of confluences of continuous change means that organizations are in perpetual motion, continually in the process of becoming, not as things made, but as processes in the making. In sections on Heidegger, Gadamer, Wittgenstein, and Gergen, he demonstrates how the move from knowledge as representation to knowing as activity has had radical implications for the way we study and approach change and organizational devel-

opment, making possible the innovations in change practices described in this book.

Chapter 4, by Bob Marshak, David Grant, and Maurizio Floris, deals with discourse and narrative. It reviews current research on how discursive devices such as narratives, stories, metaphors, and conversations and other forms of communication such as visual representations, symbols, or gestures shape meaning and influence organizational behavior. They offer eight research-based implications for Dialogic OD work, including important comments about power dynamics and political processes as well as the need for dialogic practitioners to be self-reflective.

Chapter 5, by Gervase Bushe and Jacob Storch, concerns generative images, shifting attention to the second underlying process of dialogic change; one that is closely aligned with issues of social construction but revolves around the question of where do new ideas come from. After a review of the literature on generativity, and how that concept has been discussed in OD research and writing, they offer a definition of “generative image” and a number of ideas for how OD practitioners can help leaders to create and use generative images to stimulate transformational change.

Chapter 6 focuses on the third underlying set of change processes: complexity, self-organization, and emergence. Peggy Holman provides an overview of the key ideas in complex adaptive systems theory and traces the history of how these ideas entered managerial thinking and the practice of OD. She concludes with an overview of how scientific ideas on emergence can be applied to Dialogic OD practice, providing a summary of her model of emergence as an OD process.

In Chapter 7 Ralph Stacey summarizes the theory of complex responsive processes of relating he has developed over the past two decades with his colleagues. Arguing that complex adaptive systems theory is too limited to be applied directly to human systems, Stacey identifies how issues like sense making, anxiety, and political processes influence the always-emerging social construction of reality. Stacey directly challenges the dominant managerial discourse—the belief that leaders can provide visions and plans that can be executed—by describing how that narrative does not match people’s actual experience of the uncertain, surprising, sometimes predictable and sometimes not flow of organizational life, and is a provocative ground for building Dialogic OD processes.

Chapter 8 focuses on the classical organization development issue of engaging clients collaboratively in co-inquiry, but from a decidedly dialogic point of view. Kevin Barge offers a model of four different conversations that take place between consultants and clients during Dialogic OD work: co-missioning, co-design, co-reflection and co-action. He looks at the value commitments of

Dialogic OD practitioners and how they shape patterns of communication, as well as the political and other tensions that can arise in this form of consulting, providing advice on how to cocreate conversations with others designed to foster learning.

In the third section we shift to Dialogic OD practice, with accomplished Dialogic OD consultants from around the world providing insight into what they do and how they do it. Each chapter provides cases that illustrate various issues and possibilities for Dialogic OD.

The Practice section begins in Chapter 9 with Jacob Storch discussing essential skills for Dialogic OD consulting from social constructionist and complexity perspectives, with a focus on how learning and change happen in organizational groups. Using a model of three skill sets needed to create the conditions wherein people will engage in changing how they act at work (strategic process design, event design, and facilitation of dialogic encounters), he presents a case to illustrate dialogic change practice in each. Storch emphasizes that change comes from engaging with people in relationally responsive conversations that enrich language, offer generative images, and allow people to respond to the social reality that emerges from having different conversations with participants holding a diversity of ideas and points of view.

Chapter 10 by Tova Averbuch deals with entry, readiness and contracting, exploring issues of client readiness to engage in Dialogic OD and describing why and how to contract for Dialogic OD consulting work. Averbuch offers a model of four entries that normally take place when consulting dialogically; aligning with the initial caller, partnering with the sponsor, engaging the management team, and cocreating with a diverse steering committee. She identifies the issues that consultants have to manage and provides key questions for making the transition between each of these stages of entry. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the complexities of contracting for change when the actual outcomes cannot be predicted, and the solutions Averbuch and her colleagues have created to manage those issues.

In Chapter 11, Yabome Gilpin-Jackson reviews a model that provides useful tools and advice for working with sponsors to engage them in the personal transformational change process a successful organizational transformation often requires. Then she offers useful tools and advice for working with the people who will have to engage in the Dialogic OD process and ultimately go through personal transformation themselves. She maps Mezirow's (1991, 2000) ten-phase model of transformative learning onto a three-stage model of Dialogic OD: initiating dialogic inquiry, facilitating the dialogic journey, and sustaining transformational momentum. In clarifying the many connections between transformative learning theory and Dialogic OD, she provides concrete advice on how to effectively disrupt prevailing social narratives, when and how to manage the emotional fallout disruption creates, and how

to meet the needs individuals have as they go through a transformational journey.

Nancy Southern, in Chapter 12, describes her model of five kinds of inquiry and offers guidance for the Dialogic OD practitioner on what kinds of inquiry to use in what conditions and how to generate questions that lead to productive conversations. She positions inquiry as a cocreative learning process that builds relationships as people come to assign meaning to the current contexts they inhabit and as they uncover the multiplicity of perspectives and aspirations, some shared and some not, that animate the life of the organization. She offers guidance about when and how to promote informative, affirmative, critical, generative, and strategic inquiries.

Chapter 13, by Chris Corrigan, deals with hosting containers and describes the theory of practice he and his colleagues have developed for ensuring productive events in which diverse people have new conversations in new ways. Many Dialogic OD processes involve large group events, and this chapter looks at generic issues in hosting such events. Corrigan describes containers as a set of concentric rings that involve various levels of engagement by ever-increasing numbers of people, explains how to create them, sets forth common stages of container development, and shows how to end them. He provides insight into the skills and attitudes required by Dialogic OD practitioners for hosting and holding containers.

In Chapter 14 Ray Gordezky provides an excellent synthesis of all the previous chapters while looking at the issues raised by using Dialogic OD in systems composed of multiple groups that do not consider themselves a single entity. Such systems could be different departments in one organization, or multiple organizations. Through a number of case examples, Gordezky looks at the issues to consider in sponsorship, design teams, and hosting events, and offers insights into how to work with these dynamics from a dialogic orientation.

Chapter 15, “Amplifying Change,” by Michael Roehrig, Joachim Schwen-denwein, and Gervase Bushe, offers a model to ensure that the energy and ideas unleashed during dialogic events translate into sustained change after the events. The authors discuss important leadership roles in creating the structures and processes that allow for experiments and improvisational change and that ensure that good ideas do not get stymied by current structures, processes and culture. They offer a different way of looking at behaviors that might appear to be “resistance,” seeing these behaviors as essential for ensuring that change proposals are grounded in organizational realities. They review what sponsors and design teams should think about in advance about the three different change stages of Modeling, Nurturing, and Embedding and how they can go about amplifying the impact of innovations that emerge from dialogic change processes.

In Chapter 16, “Dialogic Coaching” by Chené Swart, we leave the world of more structured Dialogic OD. In this and the following chapter, we look more deeply at the facilitation of dialogic processes in one-on-one, in-the-moment encounters. Swart identifies issues for Dialogic OD practitioners who want to cocreate coaching relationships and spaces for transformation by the way they listen, express curiosity, invite, ask questions, journey with clients, and help identify and name taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas. By engaging people in exploring the consequences of the narratives that they are living and envisioning the life they want, Swart offers useful questions for assisting clients in identifying alternative preferred narratives of their lives. Her models are useful both for one-on-one coaching and for facilitating any Dialogic OD process.

In Chapter 17, “Dialogic Process Consultation: Working Live,” Joan Goppelt and Keith Ray invite us into a provocative perspective on OD consulting. Grounded in such ideas as Stacey’s complex responsive processes of relating, the coordinated management of meaning (Pearce & Cronen, 1980), and Shotter’s (1993) social constructionism, they provide a series of consulting vignettes and explain the mindset behind the choices they make to disrupt habituated processes and create changes to the social construction of reality. They describe a form of consulting wherein the OD practitioner fully joins into the ever-flowing now, recognizing that every conversation they enter into is part of a series of conversations that have already taken place and will continue to take place. Eschewing the use of dialogic events or special techniques, they instead describe a set of “micropractices” in which the consultant authentically shows up, engages fully, and encourages reflexive and generative conversations.

Patricia Shaw provides a commentary on this chapter, deepening our thinking about the nature of “working live.” She suggests that dialogic process consultants offer clients comfort with experiences of open-endedness, incompleteness, multiplicity of intentions, and goals—experiences managers think are the antithesis of well-run enterprises. She argues that this is a powerful form of leadership education because the capacity to live in an uncertain, complex world cannot be taught, modeled, or demonstrated, but only emerges in relationships that invite a profound shift in how we experience the world and ourselves. She reminds us that the human tendency to want to make organizational action more controllable leads to various forms of oppression, and points out that our emphasis on narrative modes of sense making allow us to reveal meaning without making the error of trying to assert one truth or reality.

In the concluding chapter we discuss some of the key questions yet to be answered and provide tentative propositions, hoping to provoke more study and writing about the nature of Dialogic Organization Development.

Closing Comments

The seventeen chapters in this book offer a treasure trove of theories, models, and techniques. Some of the authors have read and commented on other authors' chapters. We have worked hard with each author to integrate the ideas presented and the form of presentation, so that this book reads less like a set of disconnected voices and more like a coherent set of different voices that are aware of each other, in dialogue with each other. We think that this book, unlike most edited volumes, flows well from start to finish, each chapter coming in a more or less logical progression and offering a different and useful set of ideas for the Dialogic OD practitioner. Together, they offer a vision of an inquiry-based change process, able to help individuals, groups, organizations, and communities take on complex challenges and wicked problems better than any other method. Ultimately, we believe that is the ambition and future of Dialogic OD theory and practice.

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